# Castlemaine Naturalist

February 2019

Vol. 44.1 #472

**Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.**

Nesting Willy Wagtail, Railway dam in December
- photo by Noel Young

## Around the world on Members' Night

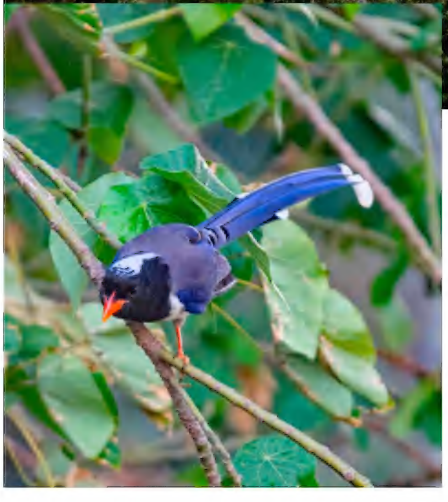
The final meeting for the year is an opportunity for members to present brief reports on their experiences in nature, or other items to entertain us as the year comes to its close.

How many of us knew that about two thirds of the Territory of Hong Kong is protected in nature reserves? Euan Moore and Jenny Rolland visited HK during the year and explored several reserves including the internationally significant wetlands of Mai Po NR. Euan showed us images of a selection of the many bird species they saw. We were then brought back home by Jenny's report on the collaborative Communities Listening to Nature project involving Connecting Country, VNPA Nature Watch and Museums Victoria. Song meters are being used to identify the nocturnal species in those parts of the Bendigo Box-Ironbark KBA (Key Biodiversity Area) near Castlemaine.

Judy Hopley took us south to Tasmania's Bruny Island, where she and Philip visited the Inala Nature Reserve. They observed Swift Parrots breeding (threatened by Sugar Gliders attacking nests); 40 Spotted Pardalotes (which usually have only about 40 spots) - also threatened, by a parasitic wasp; Pink Robins and a White Wallaby.

Then we were off to the north east coast of Britain with Joy Weatherill, who spent a week in a cottage at St Abs, Northumberland – home of Puffins, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and many other species who roost and nest on the spectacular cliffs. As well as her spectacular photos, Joy brought examples of her fine sketches and paintings illustrating her trip. Finally, Noel Young brought us home with a selection of the birds he has photographed over recent months, and Geoff Harris rounded off the contributions with his splendid song marking the club's activities through the year. We then adjourned for a fine supper.

Peter Turner with thanks to Euan Moore and Joy Weatherill



Clockwise from left:

Red-billed Blue Magpies are found in gardens and rainforest on Hong Kong Island.

Ham Tin Wan Bay; about 2hrs walk from the nearest road.

Kerrie Jennings attaching a Song Meter to a tree for recording nocturnal bird calls

## THE YEAR AT FIELD NATS
## (to the tune of Sounds of Silence by Simon & Garfunkel)

HELLO FIELD NATS MY OLD FRIENDS,
IT'S GOOD TO BE WITH YOU AGAIN,
WE'LL TALK ABOUT THE FLOWERS & TREES,
WE'LL TALK ABOUT THE BIRDS & BEES,
& OF A YEAR . . . WITH MANY GREAT TALKS & WALKS,
BUT IT'S BEEN DRY,
LET'S REVIEW OUR YEAR . . IN FIELD NATS.

RICHARD'S SHOWN US MANY FLOWERS,
NIGEL'S WATCHED THE BIRDS FOR HOURS,
READ JOY'S REPORTS & PHOTOGRAPHS,
PICKED UP RUBBISH & SEEN SOME BATS,
WE'VE HAD EXCURSIONS . . . & SPEAKERS WITH EARNEST FACES,
TOOK US MANY PLACES,
ALL PART OF OUR YEAR . . IN FIELD NATS.

OUR ENVIRONMENT IS SICK,
OUR POLITICIANS NEED SOME STICK,
WE ALL MUST DO THE BEST WE CAN,
EVERY WOMAN & EVERY MAN,
TO RAISE . . . AWARENESS OF OUR PLIGHT,
IT'S JUST NOT RIGHT,

BUT STILL IT'S PART . . OF FIELD NATS.

THANK YOU GEORGE OUR PRESIDENT,
& PETER FOR THE TIME YOU'VE SPENT,
GERALDINE YOUR CAKES WERE GOOD,
NOEL'S NEWSLETTERS ARE ALSO FOOD,
AND TO YOU . . . WHO CONTRIBUTED YOUR KNOWLEDGE,
& FELLOWSHIP,
THANK YOU ALL . . FOR BEING FIELD NATS.

SO NOW THIS YEAR HAS REACHED ITS END,
IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE MY FRIENDS,
SUPPERS SERVED FOR ALL TO SHARE,
SEASONAL WEATHER IS LOOKING FAIR,
AND I TRUST . . . OUR ENVIRONMENT WILL RECEIVE,
YOUR LOVE & CARE,
A MERRY CHRISTMAS . . TO ALL FIELD NATS,
MERRY CHRISTMAS . . CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATS.

- Geoff Harris

## Needle Grass getting beaten but fight not yet over

by Margaret Panter (project co-ordinator)

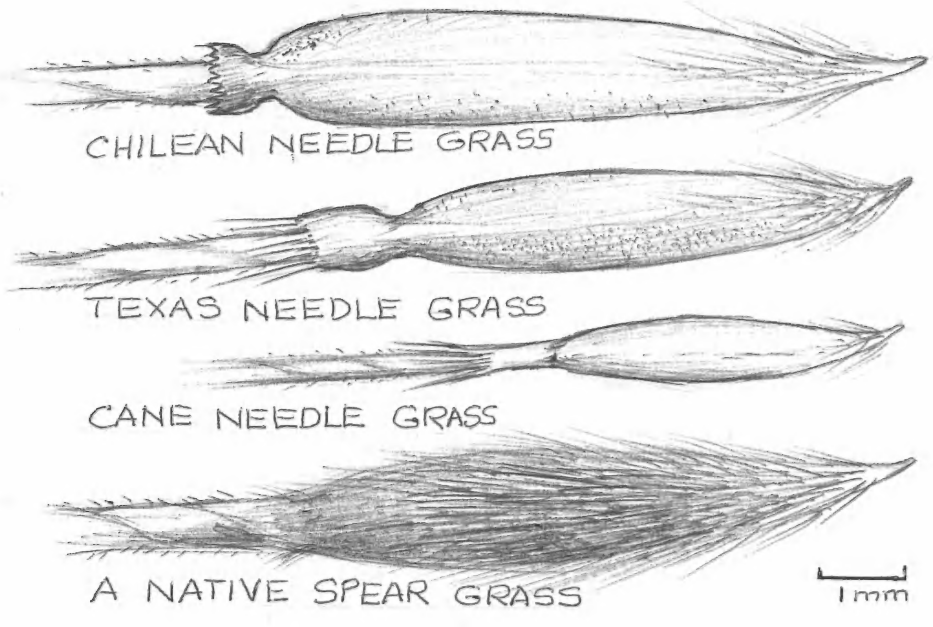
CFNC received a Community Grant of $3000 from Mount Alexander Shire Council in 2018 to continue removing stipoid weeds (Needle Grasses) from roadsides and parks in Castlemaine. The grant enabled us to pay Matt McEachran (Bushtech Ecological Land Management) to dig out or spray roadside infestations, with some volunteer input. Parks and gardens infestations were dealt with by council workers spraying and volunteers doing a lot of digging out.

Stipoid weed seeds can stay viable in soil for 12 years. So new plants must be removed every year for years before they can be said to be eradicated. Every missed plant which drops seed restarts the timeline. But this year I think there is a noticeable decrease in the density of infestations, including at the Botanical Gardens, whose infestation is the biggest in Castlemaine and contains three Needle Grasses: Cane Needle Grass (*Nassella hyalina*), Chilean Needle Grass (*N. neesiana*) and Texas Needle Grass (*N. leucotricha*). Flower heads usually appear in about mid-October, and keep pushing up from the same or new plants until soil moisture is exhausted (usually about mid-January).

Many thanks to CFNC members, who this season have contributed about three quarters of the 50 or so volunteer hours digging out Needle Grass, mainly at the Botanical Gardens. Council gardens staff, especially Gill and Jaim, have also been extremely helpful - spraying, taking bags of Needle Grass to the tip and trying to get mowing done at the right time (after removal of Needle Grass). There is now much less Chilean and hardly any Texas and some of the dense Cane patches now appear to be less than half their original density.

Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) are a way of classifying ecosystems based on geology, altitude, climate, closeness to water, etc. Some EVCs are now threatened. The Botanical Gardens west of Forest Creek contains Box-Ironbark

Forest EVC (Depleted) and on the flatter area by the creek a mosaic of two other EVCs: Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland (Endangered) and Creek line Grassy Woodland. The Castlemaine Plant List lists 27 species of native grasses for the area. Several plants not common in Castlemaine, such as Lemon Beauty Heads (*Calocephalus citreus*), Sweet Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum suaveolens*) and Glaucous Flax-lily (*Dianella* aff. *longifolia* "Benambra") are also found in the area. Threatened species of fauna include Powerful Owls and the Eltham Copper Butterfly. All this just a couple kilometres from the Post Office. Removing Needle Grasses will help native grasses and other species to prosper.



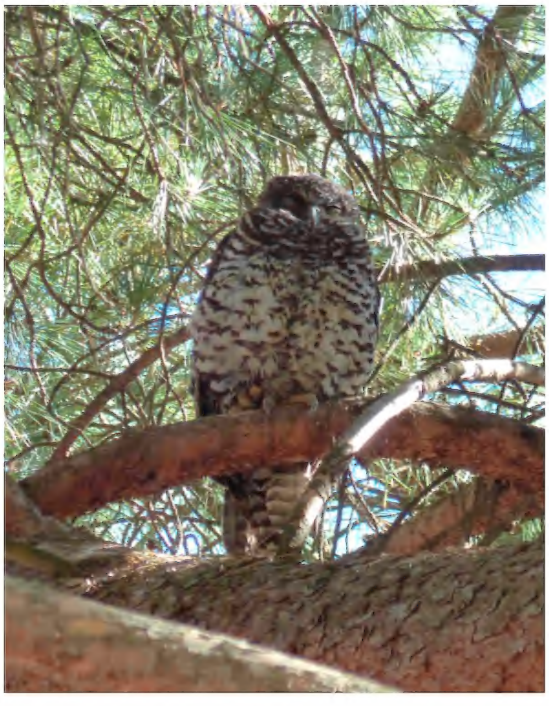

## How to tell the difference between Needle Grasses (introduced) and Spear Grasses (native):

The Needle Grasses (but not the related stipoid weed Espartillo (*Amelichloa caudata*)) all have a corona (crown/collar) where the awn (tail) comes out of the lemma ("seed"). Chilean Needlegrass's corona is shorter than it is wide with very short bristles. Texas's corona is often longer than wide, with longer bristles. Cane's corona is quite narrow, with long bristles, and its lemma is much smaller. Hair tufts are only found at the pointy ends of the Needle Grasses lemmas. Spear grasses have no corona, although they may have a tuft of hairs between the lemma and the awn. The body of the lemma is often hairy all over.

Sometimes it is as if there is a continuum between the three, with Texas sometimes looking a bit like Chilean, and at other times, looking a bit like Cane.

Margaret Panter

# Photo Observations



## Powerful Owl rediscovery!
Noel Young

On 19th January, owl watcher Tim Darling reported two back in the Botanical Gardens after being absent since late winter. Peter T confirmed this and on Tuesday 22nd I searched the gardens and found one snoozing peacefully (left) though apparently alone. It's wonderful to see them back, though the local possums may have a different opinion.

## Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Joy Weatherill

Adult and chick

# The Birds of Sutton Grange

Nigel Harland

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Red Wattlebird | Yellow-tufted Honeyeater | New Holland Honeyeater |
| Sulphur-crested Cockatoo | Long-billed Corella | Crimson Rosella |
| Red-rumped Parrot | Tree Martin | Welcome Swallow |
| Galah | White-browed Scrubwren | Superb Fairy Wren |
| Australian Raven | Wedge-tailed Eagle | Kestrel |
| Brown Falcon | Grey Shrikethrush | Willie Wagtail |
| Red-browed Finch | Common Bronzewing | Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo |
| House Sparrow | | |

# "WILDLIFE" Observations January 1940

George Broadway

Questions sent to Mr Crosbie Morrison, Editor of "Wildlife" magazine in January 1940. I would be keen to know whether our readers are finding the same specimens nearly 80 years later. (That's nearly as old as me)

First however, some news items from the time.

1 . *Presence of Argentine Ants, Iridomyrmex humilis* in Balwyn causing a stir in entomological and household circles.

2. Swarms of black and white butterflies passing through the gardens of Melbourne. After feeding on flowers they died. Believed to be the Caper White Butterfly which breeds further north and migrates South at this season.

3. Grasshoppers caused death of cattle in Queensland. After grasshoppers had eaten all the grass a shower of rain promoted a second growth of Sudan grass which at an early stage is poisonous to cattle.

4. It had been suggested that jackals should be imported to control rabbits and so remove one of the causes of soil erosion. Only male jackals would be imported so that there would be no breeding. Gasps from the audience.

**Insects**

Melbourne Specimen was not the dreaded Argentine Ant but did resemble it. Had it been an Argentine there would have been swarms - not a solitary ant.

Chelsea An ordinary little black ant. Try a bait of syrup and borax spread about in little dishes.

Lillimur (Muriel) An Ichneumon Fly, not really a fly but a wasp. I do not advocate pulling the heads off insects to kill them quickly as most of the brain is located elsewhere, so it is not surprising that this specimen lived for days without a head.

Lillimur (Lila) A butterfly chrysalis. The golden cast over it suggests that it has been parasitised by another insect similar to Muriels.

Lascelles Small plant bugs. They suck sap from plants but are otherwise harmless. Try Phenyle or an oil emulsion spray.

Pomborneit Slender Longicorn Beetle, *Phorocantha,* a notorious wood borer which would be capable of boring through fibro sheets although I have never heard of them doing so.

Collingwood Not a spider but a root-boring weevil known as an Elephant Beetle because of the trunk-like snout.

Geelong Chrysalis of one of the brown butterflies from which a wasp parasite has emerged.

Wesburn Chrysalis of Orange Butterfly, the insect emerged in the post.

Brunswick Flower Fly, harmless.

Geelong Cup moth caterpillar.

Geelong Spiny Assassin Bug; enemy of quite a number of other insects.

**Vertebrates**

Cramerton Small "Blind " snake, *Typhlops.* A true snake but harmless.

Unfortunately my copy of the Feb 40 number was rather mutilated with pages and cover missing so there were no reports of specimens. These reports usually appeared on the inside of the cover.

## From your Committee

The CFNC Committee has decided that **membership fees** for 2019-20 should remain unchanged from 2018, following last year's increase. The following motion will be put to the February meeting of members:

> *That the membership fees for 2019-20 be the same as for 2018: Single membership $35; family $50; Pensioner/concession/student $25; Pensioners/concession family $30.*

Membership fees for 2019-20 are due by 1st April; renewal forms will be mailed and emailed with the March newsletter.

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held on Friday 8th March. The agenda will include reports from our President and Treasurer, and election of the Committee for 2019-20. Nomination forms for all committee positions will be included with the March newsletter – please consider standing for election. Following the AGM, Nigel Harland will speak about his recent trip to Southern Africa.

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### SEANA Spring 2019 in Castlemaine (4 – 7 October).

The main activities during the SEANA weekend will be excursions to showcase the range of geological and ecological regions around Castlemaine, our wildflowers and birds, and examples of habitat restoration, etc. We are seeking leaders for expeditions, and "excursion facilitators" to support the leaders. Please contact George Broadway if you can assist.

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Our **guest speaker for February will be Gayle Osborne**
of Wombat Forestcare on **Fauna surveys in the Wombat Forest.**

Gayle will describe the group's motion-sensing camera projects, searches for Powerful Owls and spotlighting for Greater Gliders, and explain why entering data on the VBA is essential for conservation.

Gayle will also mention the new fungi app and who to contact for more information.

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### Castlemaine Naturalist Newsletter

Deadline for articles for the March edition is by close of Friday 25th February

Would you like to edit the newsletter? After over 10 years on the job, I would be happy to give someone else a go, or at least have someone capable of taking it on during occasions when I am travelling or otherwise indisposed. If you have experience with a word processor or publishing program and an eye for the grammatically incorrect you should be capable – it's not too difficult. - NY

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists
## Coming events

**Fri Feb 8 meeting:** speaker Gayle Osborne of Wombat Forestcare, will talk about fauna surveys in the Wombat Forest

**Fri March 8 meeting: AGM** and speaker Nigel Harland on his trip to Southern Africa

**Fri April 12 Meeting:** speaker to be decided

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings -** (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips -** (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

**Club website** (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

**Subscriptions for 2018**
Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

**2018 Committee**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
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| Treasurer: | Geoff Harris | 0418 392183 |

| | | |
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